

COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC UTILITIES

**Investigation On Its Own Motion Into The
Massachusetts Electric Companies' Preparation
and Response to the December 12, 2008
Winter Storm**

D.P.U. 09-01-A

TESTIMONY OF LENNY LAAKSO

Q: Please state your name and business address for the record.

A: My name is Lenny R. Laakso.

My business address is Fitchburg City Hall, 718 Main Street, Fitchburg,

MA

Q: What is your position with the City of Fitchburg?

A: I am the Commissioner of Public Works.

Q: Please describe your educational background.

A: I received a Bachelor of Science in Civil Engineering from Tufts University in 1974 and a Master of Science of Civil Engineering from Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1976.

Q: Please describe your work experience.

A: I am a Registered Professional Engineer and have over 30 years of engineering, construction and management experience on power plants, industrial plants, schools and infrastructure for utilities and municipalities. I became Public Works Commissioner in Fitchburg on 11/24/08, about 2-1/2 weeks before the ice storm. I worked for over 3 years full time on projects for each of the following: New York Power Authority, Safe Harbor Hydroelectric Power Corporation, National Electric Power Authority of Nigeria, Northern California Power Agency, City of Waltham and City of Chicopee.

Q: Have you presented testimony before the Massachusetts Department Of Public Utilities (the "Department")?

A: No.

Q: When did you first get involved in the ice storm?

A: The mayor called me at 2:30 A.M. on 12/12/08 and told me that she was declaring a State of Emergency because there were trees down all over the city and everyone had lost power. I was to mobilize the DPW to get the roads cleared for emergency traffic and the public.

Q: When did you report for work and what did you find?

A: Due to trees that had fallen across the end of my driveway as well as trees, poles and wires down on many streets in the Cleghorn section of Fitchburg, I did not arrive at the DPW yard until 4 A.M. At that time, we had 3 DPW workers

clearing trees, 2 DPW men sanding, and 4 contractors sanding. After 4:45 A.M., we concentrated on clearing trees. At 5 A.M., I went out with the Superintendent of Streets, John Anderson, to assess the situation. Trees were still falling and there were live wires arcing everywhere we went. Many streets were impassable so we had to turn around. Neither one of us had seen anything like it. John's reaction was that it was far worse than the Blizzard of 78. We learned first hand that it was a very dangerous situation. We were headed towards Burbank Hospital on Mechanic Street and had to detour up a side road because Mechanic Street was totally blocked by downed trees, poles and wires. We had to stop to clear a downed tree out of our way when a tree or branch struck a wire and there was a bright blue flash within feet of us. We could have been electrocuted.

Q: Were you involved with the Emergency Operations Center?

A: Yes. The mayor stopped by the DPW yard around 8:30 A.M. and took me to the EOC. I was at the EOC for the duration every day from about 8:30 A.M. to 9:00 P.M. Each day I went to the DPW yard at 6:30 or 7 A.M. to review progress and discuss strategy, and I went over there again after the afternoon EOC briefing and again after the evening EOC briefing.

Q: What were your responsibilities?

A: DPW's job was to open the roads for traffic first, then to make sure they were safe and passable in both directions for emergency vehicles. I gave direction on priorities from the EOC to the DPW yard, assigned the people to coordinate and monitor the road clearing operation and reported progress made during the EOC briefings three times per day. I also made sure that DPW had the

resources to do the job. Ultimately we hired 25 contractors at a cost of \$500,000 to supplement the DPW crews, and we had assistance from Mass Highway Dept, Mass Dept of Conservation and Recreation, and the National Guard.

Q: Did you have contact with Unitil?

A: Yes. As I mentioned earlier, it was a dangerous situation with many downed wires all over the city. We relied on Unitil personnel to tell us whether a wire was dead or live so we would know whether it was safe to work. Of course, safety of our men and contractors men and the public was the top priority.

Q: Did Unitil provide you with adequate support?

A: I would characterize their support as inadequate, especially during the first few days of the emergency. During those first few days, when we were trying to get the roads passable, even if only one lane, Unitil's support was very inadequate and it slowed down our effort to open the streets. For example, one of our first debris removal contractors, DiBara Enterprises, left the job after one day. They felt it was too dangerous because we couldn't identify which wires were live and which weren't. On the morning of that first day, December 12, we tried to get a contact from Unitil to identify downed wires as safe or live. We were told that someone named Chris Dube would be our contact during the day and Mark Frappier at night. Several times during the emergency period we were unable to reach them because they were busy in the Unitil "War Room". Also, they were working long hours and needed some time off. Early in the afternoon of the 12th, we were given the names of Peg Van Hillo and Wilma Foster as contacts, but

they could not help because they didn't have the needed information. Our dispatcher left a list of 15 streets on the 12th in the a.m. which needed to have wires checked – all main roads- with Chris Dube, but we had no response by 2:15 P.M. At 3:15 P.M., Chris Dube advised us that a Unitil representative could meet our crews on Princeton Road. However, our dispatcher advised at 4:45 P.M. that Unitil's representative couldn't tell us specifically which wires were safe to work around. Chris Dube then requested that we send him a list of streets by e-mail, so I resubmitted the earlier list of streets to Chris via email at 5:15 P.M but there was no response to the list. They were trying to identify the live lines over the phone with information they had in the office, but this proved unworkable. Instead, he stated at 8:00 P.M. that we would need someone in the field to identify the lines, as people with generators could be feeding power into the system. This is what we had been looking for in the first place.

On December 13, Unitil's Ryan Courtemache worked in the field with us in the morning to identify downed lines; however, he left the job by 1:30 P.M. and there was no replacement. Calls to Unitil for a replacement were not successful. That afternoon, Electric Ave- a major street- was blocked off because Unitil would not assist us to address it. State Representative Steve DiNatale asked me at 5:25 P.M. how things were going, and I told him that lack of Unitil support was a major problem. He said he would call someone, possibly George Gantz, and at 5:35 P.M., Linda from Unitil called to say that they would have a rep at the DPW yard in 10 minutes, and they did furnish someone that evening.

On December 14, Ryan Courtemache worked again with us. However, we were working 24 hours per day and there was no Unitil rep available after 11 P.M., but we were advised that we could try calling Unitil's dispatcher. We did so to no avail.

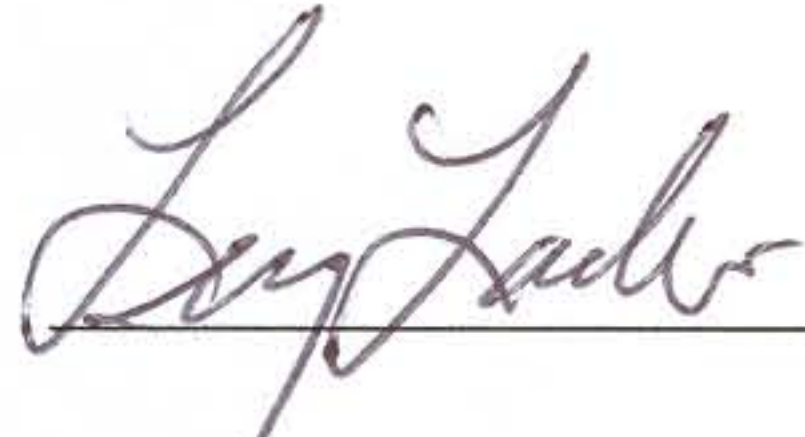
On December 15, Ryan Courtemache called to say that he was being replaced by "Johnny", who would arrive at 8 A.M.

On December 16, downed wires were still a problem. With 3" snow coming overnight, Unitil recommended in a meeting with John Anderson at 8:45 P.M. that we not plow the streets, because a plow could snag a downed wire and cause more damage.

Although Unitil's support improved with Ryan Courtemache and "Johnny" in the field, their presence was not guaranteed, and the system for requesting help was subject to change. Unitil gave us a "secret" number to call about downed wires which affected our work, beginning on December 19. Yet, on December 22, we still had to call Mark Frappier to get someone to work with us, and "Johnny" arrived at 9 A.M.

The effect of all this was that the work to clear the roads was frequently delayed by lack of a Unitil spotter to prove whether downed lines were safe to work

around. Lacking information on potential safety hazards, we had to redirect our crews to other areas that we knew were safe and return when a Unitil representative was available to assist. The response did improve as time went on, but it took days before we arrived at an acceptable routine. And, Unitil continued to need urging from us to identify which lines were safe and which were not. The people from Unitil were good and competent people- the problem was that they were short-handed.



Lenny Laakso

Commissioner, Fitchburg DPW

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DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC UTILITIES**

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Own Motion into the Preparation and Response of the
Massachusetts Electric Distribution Companies to the
December 12, 2008 Winter Storm**_____)

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AFFIDAVIT OF LENNY LAAKSO

Lenny Laakso does hereby depose and say as follows:

1. I, Lenny Laakso, on behalf of the Massachusetts Attorney General's Office, certify that the testimony listed below, which bears my name was prepared by me or under my supervision and is true and accurate to the best of my knowledge and belief:

- i. Direct of Testimony of Lenny Laakso

Signed under the pains and penalties of perjury this 25th day of March, 2009



Lenny Laakso